



ST. HILDA AND OTHER POEMS

FREDERICK W. BECKER

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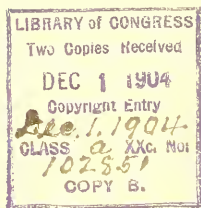


FREDERICK W. BECKER



THE GRAFTON PRESS
NEW YORK

PS 350 3
.E192 S3
1904



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ST. HILDA
AND OTHER POEMS

St. Hilda

I. THE MINSTREL

THE way-side turf was brightly gemmed
With Springtime's fairest stars;
The buds to durance long condemned
Had burst their prison bars.

The song of bird, the hum of bee,
Glad welcome gave to Spring;
The earth and sky joined heartily,
And every living thing.

Beside the way a Minstrel gray
Sang merry songs of love;
And some, perhaps, took wing that day,
O'er distant seas to rove.

And others are resounding yet,
Adown the paths of Time;
And those who hear them ne'er forget
The beauties of their rhyme.

Beside the Minstrel where he knelt
 Within that woodland bower,
There lay a Harp that ne'er had felt
 The Master's magic power.

And as his songs filled brake and wold
 With sweetest echoings,
The Minstrel took the Harp of Gold
 And touched its tensioned strings.

He swept them with his cunning sweep;
 He tried his utmost skill;
But mute, like Innocence asleep,
 They answered not his will.

Again, again, with soulful might,
 He smote each separate chord;
They trembled, as if with affright,
 Yet disobeyed their lord.

“Upon this Harp there is a spell,”
 The wondering Harper cried;
“On many have I played and well,
 Yet none has me defied.

"I leave thee here, thou Harp so cold,
Amongst the weeds and grass,
Nor tender arms shall thee enfold,
Till this has come to pass:

"Until upon some distant day,
Though many years it be,
There comes adown this winding way,
A heart attuned to thee."

II. THE SLEEPING HARP

The wild rose cried, "Awake! Awake!
And listen to my song;
Then come, my Love, thy silence break,
Why sleepest thou so long?

"My Love, arise, confide in me
And I will be thy bride;
O Love, awake! abide with me
Till ebbs life's fevered tide."

The gentle lily, drooping low,
Demurely kept apart;
She envied not the wanton's glow
Nor fickleness of heart.

She could but sigh, "If thou wilt sleep,
Then lie within this breast,
And tender vigils will I keep,
Till ended be thy rest."

The humming bird, bold brigand free,
With booty-laden soul,
Droned, "Come with me and stealthily,
O'er flowery fields we'll troll.

"And buds so fair and buds so rare,
We'll loot along the way;
And blossoms bright and debonair
Will lure us on to stay,

"Till fainting Phœbus falls asleep,
Within his crimson bed,
And dusky curtains, trailing deep,
Enshroud his dying head.

"And where the shadows thickly fall,
We'll hide on mossy banks,
And hearken for the Satyrs' call
To join them in their pranks."

The Harp slept on, nor note nor sound,
Was heard for many a year;
And dead leaves strewed the silent mound,
And weeds and grasses sear.

III. THE WANDERER

The clouds hung low in the skies one day—
The skies that once were bright —
And some were black and some were gray,
And none were lined with light.

Peculiar phantoms crept between
Those ever-shifting walls,
Like gliding monks at a midnight scene
Within their ghostly halls.

Below, dim, misty spirits dank
Went trailing noiselessly,
From tree to tree and bank to bank,
In endless phantasy.

Anon some tremulous Shape of Mist,
Recoiled with wavering grace,
When uncouth winds its garments kissed,
Or fanned its ashen face.

From out the cloud of spectres weird,
Upon that dark noontide,
A poor and lowly maid appeared,
And Sorrow walked beside.

Down the path with silent tread,
The Wanderer passed along;
She minded not the clouds o'erhead,
Nor feared the ghostly throng.

She slowly sank upon the ground,
Forsaken to her doom,
Beside the silent, leaf-strewn mound,
Beside the Harp's cold tomb.

No faith on earth, no hope of Heaven,
Was writ upon that face;
She longed for peace that ne'er was given —
The clod her resting-place.

She clasped her hands in mute despair
And tears fell warm and fast
Down pallid face, through curtaining hair;
For Life seemed dead and past.

IV. THE AWAKENING

Lo! the air was softly stirred,
As if by unseen wings;
And on the breeze was faintly heard
Uncertain whisperings.

Like echoes from those sunnier climes
Where flowed Life's happy streams,
Or faintly tinkling fairy chimes
Heard long ago in dreams.

Then plainer fell the melody
Upon that startled ear;
Upon her waiting tremblingly,
In wonder, awe, and fear.

And louder grew those wondrous notes,
Clearer — clearer — clearer,
Like carols from a thousand throats,
Nearer — nearer — nearer.

And that swelling music filled her,
With hopes gone long before;
And that welling music thrilled her
Quivering heart-strings o'er and o'er.

Then softly stole the mists away,
Dim spirits robed in white;
And the shadows — phantoms gown'd in gray—
Like shades of dying night.

And the Seasons joined with gladness
In the chorus that was borne
On the wings that swept the sadness,
From that poor heart forlorn.

And Trust, like incense from On High,
Took her in close embrace;
And Love on pinions white drew nigh
And kissed that upturned face.

V. ST. HILDA

“She softly comes in beauty fair,
With lilies on her breast;
And silver poppies in her hair, —
To woo the world to rest.

“Where'er she goes the sunshine flows
In broad and golden streams;
And every darkling heaven glows
With her bright and beauteous beams.

“And when she smiles rich music falls
In showers of delight;
Like music from the lark that calls
Its fellow in his flight.

“Upon the tender heart that breaks
She pours her healing balm;
Unto the restless soul that wakes
She whispers peace and calm.

“She draws the weary sister near
And tells of love and joy,
For her who one repentant tear
Lets fall in Hope’s employ.

“Within the sad and lonely home
She comforts those who weep,
And reads from out Life’s wondrous tome:
‘They sorrow not who sleep.’

“She plucks the thorn from out the road
That weary feet must plod;
And lifts for heavy hands the load
That falls beside the sod.”

And this was writ in glowing line
Upon a new-made page
Within the dusty Book of Time —
To shine from age to age.

WHEN SHE COMES

IN the coming of the dawning,
Like the sunshine from above
That floods the golden morning,
Thou shalt come, my sweetest Love.

In the coming of the noontide,
When all nature sings with glee,
My heart shall sing of thee, its Bride,
Love's sweetest melody.

In the coming of the twilight,
With its shadows o'er the land,
Love's star shall make our pathway bright,
As we journey hand in hand.

THE TELL-TALE SPRING

IN a quiet, restful valléy,
Where all care is laid away,
And the zephyrs gently dally
With the lilies all the day,

Where the daisies and the clover
Are a-basking in the sun,
And the cricket keeps his cover
Till his evening song's begun,

Bubbles up a crystal fountain —
Midst the buttercups all gold —
From the depths of yonder mountain:
Bringing joy and joy untold.

By this dear spring she is kneeling;
And the shadows are made light
By a face that in vain's concealing
What is writ in eyes so bright.

And I, stooping there above her,
Mirrored in the spring quite plain,
Read, what I would e'en discover,
That my love is not in vain.

THE STAR OF MY LOVING

THE Star of my Loving is set in the gloaming;
ing;

It shone for a moment, to die in the West;
And my soul it is roving — in darkness 'tis
roaming —

And from its fierce torment craves respite
and rest.

The Sun of my Longing is sunk o'er the mountain,
tain,

Hath left my heart dreary, hath left it forlorn;
Like the wanderer turning from the ne'er-flowing
fountain,

Who of life is a-weary, who would go to his
bourne.

The Wings of my Spirit are flown to the seaward;
ward;

Are battling the elements — the illimitable
tide —

And my love that was infinite, true, never wayward,
ward,

In spotless habiliments would have gowned
thee my Bride.

Then I'll quaff the dark potion, from the embittered chalice,

Till my spirit be free on the Stygian shore;
And my heart with emotion, for thee, my lost
Alice —

That hath beat but for thee — shall beat
nevermore.

AT THE GATES OF PEARL

AT the Gates of Pearl a Peri stood —
The Gates to a better land —
And the sun shone down in a golden flood
On an earnest, eager band.

“By what token,” the Peri said,
“O would’st thou enter here?”
As his gaze fell on an humble maid,
In whose eye — for joy — a tear.

“A Lover have I,” the maiden said,
“Who all for love of me,
Evil and sin aside hath laid;
That’s why we come to thee.”

Then spake the youth at the maiden’s side:
“My Love is true and good,
And for love of me hath sanctified
Her purest womanhood.”

“O enter ye!” the Peri cried,
“All love like this should be;”
And the Gates of Pearl were opened wide —
To you, my Love, and me.

IN THE MOONLIGHT

ON my soul there is painted, in colors of
gladness,
A face unacquainted with grief or with sad-
ness;
With trust overflowing, with love sweetly
' beaming,
In the twilight's faint glowing; in the star-
light's bright gleaming.

In my breast there is graven an image enduring;
My heart is its haven; my life is its mooring;
'Twas chiselled in brightness, in the moonbeam's
soft rays;
'Twill my path fill with lightness when dark
be the days.

THE SIREN'S REPULSE

“COME, thou soul with sorrow weighted!
Thou shalt find eternal rest
In these arms with solace freighted;
In these arms then sleep till sated;
Come and end thy weary quest!
In these arms then be caressed.

“In this bosom be thy pillow;
Thou shalt find it tender, true,
Sympathetic as yon willow
Weeping o’er some earthy billow,
Softly with the falling dew;
Come, my Love, thy youth renew!

“Lilies fair shall be thy cover,
Spun on warp of softest green;
Fairer than yon stars that hover
For a time — then sink forever —
Stars upon an emerald sheen;
Lily-stars spread by thy Queen.

“Songs of love shall be the chorus;
Songs of love and minstrelsy,

Sung by Nymphs who shall adore us,
While fair Sprites shall trip before us —
Song and dance and revelry —
Heart and soul Love's symphony.

"Wouldst thy soul from love-scenes wander!
Shouldst thy soul crave loud acclaim!
Martial strains in torrent thunder
Shall be thine, thine without number;
Echoes of my hero's fame —
Echoing far my hero's name.

"Turn thine eyes from yonder crescent,
Flaunting faithless rays and cold;
Turn thine eyes to mine, liquescent
With the tears of love, quiescent,
Till thou cam'st like Knight of Old:
Till thou cam'st my love to hold."

"Those rays that on me are beaming
Beam on her who far away —
Beam on her who now lies dreaming —
Her whose heart with love is teeming
For a wanderer gone astray;
For this lone soul held at bay.

“Then by that Celestial token
 Sending hope from yonder sky —
By that promise I have spoken
Love for her shall keep unbroken!
 I abjure thee — thee deny!
 I abhor thee and defy!”

THE DECEITFUL DAISY

MY heart saith that he loves me;
This flower saith not so:
Then shall I b'lieve my fancy,
Or this white and golden blow?

My spirit is in travail,
Like waves on a troubled sea,
When I this bloom unravel
And it saith he loves not me.

But away, deceitful flower!
Nor will I trust thee more —
For see! towards yonder bower,
My Love hastes as of yore.

He will clasp me to his bosom,
On my lips will print a kiss;
Then away, thou falsest blossom!
Would'st thou deny me this?

THE SOUTH-WINDS SAY

THE South-winds say — “Delay! Delay!”
The soft winds say — “O stay! O stay!”
And be thou lulled as we will;
Then go not forth to the dreary North,
Where the winds and the hearts are chill!

“And we will wreathe, as we softly breathe —
Yes! we will wreathe and with Poppies sheathe
Thy soul in Celestial ease;
Then go not forth to the dreary North,
By the dark and the storm-swept seas!

“’Neath cerulean skies love’s emblem lies;
To empyreal skies love’s spirit flies,
To roam in ethereal bliss:
Then go not forth to the dreary North,
When in South-land love is like this!”

“’Neath Northern skies, my Paradise;
Towards Northern skies, my spirit flies,
To dwell with an Angel bright;
In the twilight’s falling my Love is calling;
And my Love is my soul’s pure light.

“Then I must away, nor can delay!
I must away, nor another day,
From the bosom of my Love abide!
In the twilight’s falling my Love is calling;
And my Love is my Life’s sweet bride.

“My sweetheart, I come! no more to roam:
My darling I come to thy Northern home,
Where thy love makes all skies blue;
For in the twilight’s falling I hear thee calling:
‘Oh, come to this heart so true!’”

THE LOVERS' MIRAGE

BY the shadows of the minaretted-city's
marble gate,
'Neath the gently-nodding branches of the purple-fruited date,
'Mid the softly-murm'ring echoes of the fountain's silver rill,
Where the sweetly-scented lotus-perfumed zephyrs play at will,
Sits a maiden watching, waiting, gazing fondly o'er the sands;
Sits a maiden patient, praying for her Love from distant lands:
"O Allah be good, and Allah be kind,
And shield my lord from the scorching wind."

When, with face aglow with rapture, the maid
with gladsome cry,
Where, on the far horizon, blends burning sand and sky,
A silhouetted form beholds with eager outstretched arm:
"O Allah be praised! it is my lord, returned safe from harm!

Then will I in this paradise his safe return
prepare;
With sweet acacia blossoms deck my scented,
raven hair;
Upon my amber-tinted breast shall sleep the
lotus bloom;
Thus greet my lord with joyousness and sweetest
of perfume.

“But see! My eye deceiveth me; his step doth
not draw nigh;
Wait! My lord, on wings of love to thy true
side I fly,
With wine of milk from thy good steed and
aromatics choice,
So shall thy fainting heart and soul with mine,
my lord, rejoice.”

Forgetful of the scorching wind and of the burn-
ing waste,
Like the swift gazelle she speeds in fear-oblivious
haste,
One wish alone beats in her heart, one wish
gleams in her eye,
To greet her lord in sweet embrace or with him
go to die.

“My lord, O come! My heart grows faint;
my lord, O come! I fall;
Here by this parchèd rivulet, 'neath this dis-
mantled wall,
Where in those fruitful days agoe there purled
a stream so rife,
I lay me down in weariness; lay down for thee
my life.”

On the desert's flaming bosom like a fiery expanse,
'Mid the tessellating sepulchres of fated caravans,
In the wake of the sirocco swirling on in demon
blast,
By the long-forsaken fountain that for aye hath
flowed its last,
Stands an Arab, looking, longing, gazing fondly
towards the East;
Stands an Arab panting, pining from his load
to be surceast;
To Allah he prayed, for Allah is great:
“O guard my maid at the marble gate!”

When lo! He looks with anxious gaze and sees,
with throbbing heart,
Away upon the billows red where grove and
desert part,

A vision fair; a vision bright; with eager out-
stretched arm,

“O Allah, shield yon faithful maid, else she do
suffer harm!

“Return to thy abiding-place; return, my own
sweet maid,

And tarry thou, till I do come, beneath the palm
tree’s shade;

And await thy lord with open arms by the
laughing fountain-side,

Where of the lotus fruit we’ll eat till the Gates
of Joy ope’ wide!”

Vanished is the vision bright, oh, buried is the form
Beneath the desert’s cerement; the desert’s
yellow storm.

“Be brave, my own sweet maid, be brave, for
see, I come! I come!

To lay me by thy side to die or safely bear thee
home.

“Awake! My very soul, awake! Awake, my
own dear Heart!

For see, on wings of love I’ve come, from thee no
more to part!

Awake! Light of my Life, awake! — Allah! I
fall — I faint —”

And the fiendish winds in ghoulish glee but
mocked the sad complaint.

In the swiftly falling shadows of the Libyan
twilight,

Neath the sable-drapèd mantle of the dusky
Queen of Night,

In the solemn, silent haven of the desert’s fitting
tomb,

Where lies buried grief and sorrow deep as
Earth’s maternal womb,

Sleeps an Houri; sleeps a Mah’med; in Celestial
pose and mould;

Sleeps a Maiden and her Lover, clasped in arms
of bronze and gold;

Nevermore will sit the Maiden gazing fondly
o’er the sands,

Nevermore will come the Lover, for his own,
from distant lands;

For Allah was stern, though Allah was nigh,
And His heart did turn from the Lovers’ cry.

TO EUNICE

WE welcome thee, fair Eunice,
The fairest in the land,
With hearts that e'er to thee are bound
By pure affection's band;
We welcome thee in joyousness,
And greet with gladsome hand.

When they took thee, fairest Eunice,
They robbed us of the light
That beamed from orbs the truest
And turned our day to night;
A night bereft of moon and stars —
Nor e'en a glimmer bright.

But see, our fairest Eunice!
In the East the dawn doth break;
And the gloomy shadows of the night,
Now speedy wings do take,
And with songs of joyousness the birds
A newborn day awake.

Then welcome, fairest Eunice,
And thrice welcome be our meed;

And welcome to these loyal hearts,
That never more shall bleed;
For thou art with us once again —
What more doth true hearts need ?

COME

IN my breast thou did'st find a fountain
As pure as the sparkling dew,
That gladdens the field and the mountain,
Wan nature and life to renew.

Thou foundest what none e'er discovered,
In this heart, in its solitude old;
And 'twas thy warm love that uncovered
This fount of its frost and its cold.

Thou did'st revel in its bounteous flowing,
Like the nymphs at sport in the sea,
In whose tresses the sunbeams are glowing,
And the zephyrs are dancing in glee.

Then the boreal winds came blowing,
And they chilled the stream of my love;
But they could not fetter its flowing
At its source in my heart, though they strove.

Should'st thou of thy life become weary,
Should'st thou for pure love be athirst,
Then come! when forsaken and dreary,
And drink at this fount as at first.

LEA

LEA came when midnight's mourning
Fringed with gloomy shadows dread,
Shrouded every once-adorning
Star, that it from Heaven fled;
While the chill winds yet were moaning;
While my heart in bonds lay groaning;
Dirges was my soul intoning
For the hopes that there lay dead.

Lea, I did name that maiden
When she came, long, long ago,
When with tears the skies were laden
Till the clouds did overflow.
Tender was her gladsome greeting,
Whispering, "Sorrows shall be fleeting;
Bright days shall be yours through meeting
Lea, on your night of woe."

Thus the saintly Angels sent her
To me on that starless night;
Much those luminous Angels lent her
Spirit of their love and light,
That she came in brightness gleaming;
So she came with beauty beaming;
Lea came my life redeeming
From its Winter's withering blight.

Ever at that altar kneeling,
Votive incense offering there —
Incense sweetly upward stealing
Mingled with this lover's prayer:
May our love be, ye supernal
Fates who rule in realms eternal,
Ever fragrant as the vernal
Bloom that burthens Carmel's air.

THE TOILER'S DREAM

I HEAR the great cathedral bells!
And from the blessed chime there wells
A note of joy and peace.
And from their golden-tongued throats,
A melody to Heaven floats
That tells of pain's surcease.

And as the cadences arise,
Like sweetest incense, to the skies,
My soul in rapture waits;
For to the echoes of the chime
Come wafted downward notes sublime,
From out the Golden Gates.

And I hear the angels singing,
As my spirit, swiftly winging,
Soars to realms above;
And I hear a song in Glory,
That tells a new, new story —
That tells of endless love.

And the angels come to meet me,
And with smiles the angels greet me,
In the New Jerusalem.

And the love I there see beaming
Is the brightest jewel gleaming
In the Savior's diadem.

* * * * *

Oh, horror! What this brazen din,
That, with the gray dawn creeping in,
Fills heart and soul with gloom!
It is that hollow, mocking clang
That ever down the ages rang,
That tolled the slave to doom.

Ah me! 'Twas but a vision brief
That took me from this world of grief
To realms of brightest life.
'Twas ever thus these weary years,
That dreamland smiles gave way to tears
Of earth's hard toil and strife.

Oft through the vigils of the night,
My soul would fain have taken flight —
Have fled this aching mold.
But with the morn, that doleful bell
Repeats the mandate I know well,
To meet the world so cold.

With heart and soul devoid of trust,
A sacrifice to mammon-lust,
 I go with halting feet,
And join the listless, weary throng
That struggles aimlessly along
 To toil in yonder street.

WHEN ALICE CAME

“**Y**OU came to me, Alice, in the budding of
springtime;
When April’s soft tear-drops were dried by
May’s sunshine;
When all nature was throbbing to burst from
her prison,
And Love from his wintry couch had but
risen.

“Your eyes, O my sweetheart, were springtime’s
best flowers;
Like violets bathing in April’s pure showers;
Or dewdrops a-gleaming, like stars that were
riven
To shine here on earth and make this, Love,
my heaven.

“Your lips like the coral? O never! no, never!
Like pinkest of rosebuds? Ah, ever! yes, ever!
With warmth overladen and bursting with
fragrance,
And quivering, trembling, to love’s sweetest
cadence.

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“On my cheek there was wafted — methought
it was summer —

Warm zephyrs — Pray, April, since when are
you warmer

Than June, with its roses and sunshine and
glory ?

Quoth April quite naively, ‘It is the old
story.’”

MY CAPTAIN

MY Jack was my good captain,
And I my captain's mate;
And calmly we were sailing
To gain the Westward Gate.

No need had we of compass,
Nor need of mariner's chart,
For the course that we were steering
We both knew well by heart.

The sky was clear and cloudless —
As fair as sky could be —
And placid was the bosom
Of that, our summer sea.

The sun high in the zenith
Smiled with the laughing tide;
And spangled every ripple,
Like the gown of a gypsy bride.

No thought had we of danger,
Nor feared we aught the storm
That ever follows sunshine,
As follows night the morn.

We sighed but with the breezes
That drove our bark along,
And softly joined their chorus,
Humming through shrouds their song.

When lo! from out the Northward,
A mighty storm did blow;
And darkness filled the Heavens,
And hid the sun's bright glow.

Like mountains were the billows;
Dark valleys lay between;
Our bark, like one sore-wounded,
Did stagger and careen.

When with a parting fury,
The hurricane had passed,
And I found myself awaking
'Mid the wreckage of the mast,

I saw engulfed my captain,
Beneath the foamy track;
And the parting winds brought to me
This message from my Jack:

“Keep true the course you’re steering,
My own, my faithful mate,
And in the night-shades’ falling
You will make the Westward Gate.

“And o’er the waters gleaming
You will see the harbor light;
And find your captain waiting,
Through every watch of night.”

O’er many a sea of glory,
By many a coral strand,
Past happy, lithesome mermen
With smile and beckoning hand,

By many a sun-kissed island,
Through many a perfumed breeze;
Yet I heeded not their temptings
To rest in flowery ease.

With song and jest and laughter,
Full many a crew sailed by;
Nor cared I for their pleasures,
Nor heaved one envious sigh.

I kept the course I promised
And bravely held the helm,
And steered my bark by dangers
Which others did o'erwhelm.

And now the shadows deepen;
The sun to sleep has gone;
My heart now truly tells me
My voyaging is done.

Lo! Now I see a glimmer —
The harbor light I see!
O Holy, Heavenly beacon
I long have watched for thee!

I hear you call, my captain!
I see your face full well;
I knew that you would greet me,
When night-shades round me fell.

For, captain, O my captain,
I kept the course so true!
For, captain, O my captain,
I longed to be with you!

And now, with you, my captain,
Within this Westward Gate,
I anchor here forever —
Your own, your faithful mate.

TO APRIL'S BROOK

LIKE a minnesinger's heart-sung lay
That is wafted down from a bygone day,
Your song shall echo — echo — echo —
Until the stars forget to glow.

A song of love with trust entwined;
A melody of hope combined
With faith, and sweetest sympathy
For those who weep on bended knee.

Then let your music loud resound
As down your rocky bed you bound,
And tell faint hearts that drooping lie
You bring them life — they shall not die.

And as o'er lea you wend your way,
Sing soft a soothing roundelay;
And on your bosom — to the seas
Bear thou the tears — bring thou heart's-ease.

Then hurry on! Delay no more!
By castle gate, past cottage door,
Let this then be your one refrain:
To aching hearts love comes again.

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